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The Pennsylvania State University
Department of Agricultural Education
State College, Pennsylvania

WHAT VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE TEACHERS AND SUPERVISORS
SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION PROGRAM *

1. What information about ACP should the teacher be prepared to give his students?

Teachers of agriculture should be able to give students, particularly the young farmer group, information relative to the broad objectives of the program and the organizational structure on a national, state, and local level with emphasis on the local level. He should acquaint them with the AC program literature for the current year with the objective of presenting the facts the same as he might do, for example, with farmer cooperatives, the Grange, Federal Land Bank, or the Agricultural Extension Service. It is one of several agencies in the community providing a service for farmers. What part or parts of the program will be used by individual farmers will require making certain decisions. Decisions made will be valuable to the farmer to the extent that he has facts to make sound decisions. Let's present the facts as completely and accurately as possible and let the farmer decide.

2. How can ACP be used as a tool to help the vocational agriculture student make better progress toward the goals included in his farm plan?

Through the Agricultural Conservation Program, our Government offers to share the costs of carrying out soil and water conservation practices that are necessary to achieve a sound system of soil and water management. Therefore, any high school Vo-ag student, young farmer, or adult who is operating a farm and whose farm plan shows a need for any conservation measure that is included in the local ACProgram, may be eligible for cost-sharing assistance. The cost-sharing assistance that may be approved should be especially helpful to young farmers who, quite often, do not have adequate capital to make needed changes.

A study of the ACProgram for Pennsylvania for any given year will give the student an understanding of some of the broader aspects of an over-all conservation program and of all its implications. It will aid the student in an appreciation of the fact that conservation practices are not limited to a few practices. To the extent that an understanding of ACP enables the student to think in terms of long-range objectives and over-all planning, it will further aid him in progress toward his goals.

* Answers to the questions have been provided by Mark Shuman, Acting State Administrative Officer, Pennsylvania State Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Office, and N. K. Hoover, Department of Agricultural Education, The Pennsylvania State University.

3. How can the teacher keep himself best informed currently on ACP?

Upon request, the ASC State Office will send the teacher a copy of the Agricultural Conservation Program handbook for the State. A study of this handbook will give the teacher of agriculture an over-all view of the State-wide program. By working with the ASC county committee in developing the county ACP program and getting copies of the county ACP program handbook, the teacher can keep informed on the local program. The local program, after all, is the one that is of most concern to the teacher since it will determine the cost-sharing assistance available to farmers in his area and the conditions for receiving this assistance. He should also know what the farmers in his community are doing in the way of conservation. Close contact with the county committee and the literature the committee is using will insure his keeping informed.

4. What is the purpose of ACP?

For several years the Congress has each year authorized a "program of soil-building practices and soil- and water-conserving practices" (the Agricultural Conservation Program) to carry into effect the following purposes of the Congress (in Section 7(a) of the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, as amended): "... (1) Preservation and improvement of soil fertility; (2) promotion of the economic use and conservation of land; (3) diminution of exploitation and wasteful and unscientific use of national soil resources; (4) the protection of rivers and harbors against the results of soil erosion in aid of maintaining the navigability of waters and water courses and in aid of flood control . . ."

The objective and purpose of the ACP are stated in the Secretary's Foreword to the 1955 National Bulletin, as follows: "The primary objective of the program is the protection of the public's interest in the Nation's soil and water resources.

"The 1955 program has one purpose and one purpose only: It is to advance the over-all conservation accomplishment of the Nation. How well it succeeds will depend almost completely on how well it is used by local groups and individual farmers to meet the community and individual farm conservation problems of soil and water conservation which farmers and ranchers otherwise would not solve in 1955.

"Through it the work of research, education, and technical assistance in soil and water conservation can be extended and made more effective."

The program principles of each annual program are set out in the ACP National Bulletin for the year.

5. How long has the Agricultural Conservation Program been in existence?

The first Agricultural Conservation Program was operated in the calendar year 1936. Each year since there has been an annual program.

6. Who may participate in the ACP?

Any farm operator is given an opportunity to request that the Federal Government share in the cost of those conservation practices included in the county ACP program on which he considers he needs assistance in order to permit their performance in adequate volume on his farm. Any farm operator is eligible for assistance on a farm of such size and on which farming practices are so conducted that increased conservation of soil and water can be obtained by performing practices according to the specifications in the individual ACP county handbook. Practices on which cost-sharing is to be approved must be requested before the performance of the practice is started. The county committee approves the number of units of the individual practice and the amount of cost-sharing in terms of dollars and cents for the completion of the practice.

7. What amount of assistance is available to an individual farmer through the ACP?

The county ASC committee determines the extent to which Federal funds will be made available to share the cost of each approved practice on each farm, taking into consideration the county allocation of funds, conservation problems in the county, and of the problems on the individual farm. The total of all Federal cost-sharing under the 1955 program to any person shall not exceed the sum of \$1,500.

8. What is the relationship of ACP to other USDA "action" programs?

The public has provided several basic resources or tools to help farmers develop and carry out area and farm conservation programs. These resources and tools include research, educational services, conservation program planning, technical services, commercial services and materials, credit and cost-sharing. The principal cost-sharing resource is the Agricultural Conservation Program.

A sound program of public cost-sharing is dependent upon:

- (1) An adequate research program to insure soundness,
- (2) An aggressive and effective education program to bring information and motivation along with certain skills,
- (3) Sources of technical services to supply skills not readily acquired by many farmers,
- (4) Credit adapted to farm needs,
- (5) Adapted commercial services and materials available where and when needed.

Private enterprise has developed numerous services to help meet needs such as those referred to. Also, the U. S. Department of Agriculture and other governmental agencies (Federal and State) have developed various action programs needed, in the public interest, to encourage or stimulate needed progress in solving problems in that field. The ACP and these other official action programs are intended to supplement each other in their service to farmers, in a setting of

a farmer-business-government participation. (This process of co-operation among separate agencies designed and equipped to do phases of the job best has been likened to a group of implements needed by a farmer to make a crop: He uses the tool needed -- a plow, a harrow, a planter, a cultivator, a sprayer, and a harvester.)

The ACP is developed by representatives of USDA services with conservation responsibilities (primarily the Agricultural Conservation Program Service, the Forest Service, and the Soil Conservation Service at the National level, and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation committees, the Soil Conservation Service, the Forest Service, and the Extension Service at the State and county levels) and other agricultural agencies on a cooperating or advisory basis.

In the field of operations, the ACP is administered in the U. S. Department of Agriculture by the Agricultural Conservation Program Service and in the States and counties by the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation State and county committees on which the Extension Service is represented. Farmers requesting ACP cost-sharing are encouraged to relate their requests to the furtherance of progress on any written farm plans that they have developed with the assistance of any agency (for example, Soil Conservation District, Farmers Home Administration, Extension Service, Vocational Agriculture, or a commercial farm management agency). If cost-sharing is approved by the ASC county committee and certain practices require technical determinations, the Soil Conservation Service and the Forest Service are assigned technical responsibilities. In general, educational work on ACP is the responsibility of the regular educational agencies in the field of agriculture.

9. What types of conservation practices are eligible for cost-sharing under ACP?

The types of eligible practices might be considered under four groups:

- (1) Practices to establish or improve grass and legume cover for soil or watershed protection;
- (2) Practices to provide cover, green manure, and improve the organic content of the soil;
- (3) Practices in land and soil management to provide for soil protection and improvement by controlling the flow of water on the surface or by improving drainage; and
- (4) Practices to improve the stand of forest trees by new plantings or by improvement of existing stands of forest trees.

Examples of practices in Group (1) are initial treatment of cropland or cropland pasture with lime to permit the use of grasses and legumes for soil improvement and protection, the initial improvement of established grasses and legumes, the initial establishment of grasses and legumes.

Examples of practices in Group (2) are seeding of ryegrass, field brome grass and legumes as cover or green manure crops.

Examples of practices in Group (3) are contour stripcropping, sod waterways, diversion terraces, open drainage systems and tile underdrain systems.

Examples of practices in Group (4) are planting forest trees, and improving stands of forest trees.

10. Who determines which practices are eligible for cost-sharing on a particular farm?

Farmers who desire to participate in the Agricultural Conservation Program enroll, list the conservation practices for which they are requesting assistance, and indicate the number of units (acres, tons, cubic yards, etc.) of each practice for which they desire cost-sharing approved. The ASC county committee approves cost-sharing by individual practices, specifying the amount of dollars-and-cents assistance approved for each practice. County committees do not always approve assistance for each practice for which cost-sharing has been requested on a particular farm, nor do they always approve assistance for the number of units for which assistance is requested for a particular practice. This failure to approve the assistance in the exact amount requested and for each practice requested may be necessary in order to stay within available funds. Under other circumstances, approval for cost-sharing exactly as requested may not be approved because, in the judgment of the committee, the practice will not be carried out in proper sequence, is not needed to the extent indicated, is not feasible under the particular conditions, is considered to be established and therefore a routine farming operation, or some other circumstances indicate that the expenditure of public funds is not justified. After the county committee makes its determinations, each farmer is notified of the practice or practices approved for cost-sharing on his farm, the units of practices approved, and the dollars-and-cents assistance available to him for the approved practice or practices when performed according to specifications.

11. What provision is there for technical assistance on the more technical practices?

Practices such as contour stripcropping or field stripcropping may be laid out under the supervision of the Soil Conservation Service or the Extension Service. The more highly technical practices such as planting orchards on the contour, developing springs or seeps for livestock water, constructing farm ponds for livestock water or for irrigation water, initial establishment of sod waterways, constructing terraces, constructing diversion terraces, constructing drop spillways, chutes, etc., open drainage ditches, and installing tile underdrains are under the direct supervision of the Soil Conservation Service technicians. The Soil Conservation Service technicians will perform the following services for these more highly technical practices:

- (1) Make a finding that the practice is needed and practicable on the farm;
- (2) Make necessary site selection, other preliminary work, and layout work of the practice;
- (3) Perform necessary supervision of the installation; and
- (4) Make certification of performance.

The Forest Service assumes responsibility for providing needed technical assistance with respect to forestry practices.

12. Does ACP help a farmer obtain materials and services needed in carrying out conservation practices?

Part or all of the Federal cost-sharing for an approved practice may be in the form of conservation materials or services furnished through the program for use in carrying out the practice. Where conservation materials or services are furnished, the farmer will pay that part of the cost of the material or service which is in excess of the Federal cost-share attributable to the use of the material or service. In Pennsylvania all county committees furnish lime as a conservation material. Some county committees furnish tile and direct services of custom operators of heavy equipment for use in constructing terraces and carrying out other practices requiring such equipment.

13. When does a farmer receive the assistance provided under ACP?

That part of the assistance approved for a farm which is in the form of conservation materials or services, will be made available prior to or at the time the practice is carried out. Upon the completion of a practice that does not involve conservation materials or services furnished through the ACP, the farmer files a report containing necessary information concerning the completion of the practice with the ASC county committee. Applications for payment are then completed and the ACP assistance in the form of a check from the Federal Government will be mailed direct to the producer.

The U. S. Congress usually does not provide funds through the Appropriation Acts until July of each calendar year and, therefore, ACP applications cannot be paid by the Federal Government until the last six months of each calendar year.

14. Will ACP aid in maintaining conservation practices established under this program?

It is the policy of the U. S. Department of Agriculture that farmers will maintain conservation practices after they are established under the Agricultural Conservation Program. Farmers are aided in establishing a practice but it is the farmer's full responsibility to maintain the practice after it is established.

15. How is the ACP related to the Soil Conservation District program?

The Agricultural Conservation Program is one of the important tools available in a Soil Conservation District to assist in carrying out the soil conservation program of the District. Any soil conservation practices approved for cost-sharing within the District will be among those that are essential on some farms in order to achieve the Soil Conservation District program objectives. The members of the governing body of the Soil Conservation District join with the other groups having conservation responsibilities in developing the annual ACP program for the county.

Farmer participating in the Agricultural Conservation Program is encouraged to use the available cost-sharing assistance in carrying out the conservation plan that he has developed for his farm through the assistance of the Soil Conservation District. With all interested groups working together to develop a county Agricultural Conservation Program, cost-sharing will be offered on the most needed practices included in the plan that each farmer has developed through the assistance of the Soil Conservation District. The rates of cost-sharing will be set at a level so that most farmers will be financially able to proceed in carrying out their planned conservation programs.

16. Who administers and otherwise services the ACP -- Federal, State, County?

At the Federal level the Secretary of Agriculture is responsible for the administration of the Agricultural Conservation Program. Under the present organization of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, the Secretary of Agriculture's responsibilities are delegated to an Assistant Secretary in charge of Federal-States Relations. The Administrator of the Agricultural Conservation Program Service is directly responsible to the Assistant Secretary in charge of Federal-States Relations.

Within each State, the Agricultural Conservation Program is administered by an ASC State Committee. This committee is composed of three farmers, appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture, and the State Director of Extension Service. The ACP program operations and policies established by the ASC State Committee are handled by a Program Specialist in charge of this program.

Within the county, the Agricultural Conservation Program is administered by the ASC County Committee. This committee is composed of three farmers and generally the County Extension Agent. The farmer members are elected by the farmers in the county. This committee carries out its responsibilities under the supervision of the ASC State Committee and utilizes the community committeemen and other employed personnel. The committee is also responsible for the administration of adjustment programs which include acreage allotments, marketing quotas, and price support activities.

In performing the above functions, the ASC County Committee shall:

- (1) Provide, within budgetary limitations, necessary office space, equipment, supplies, and services to carry out their assigned responsibilities;
- (2) Employ the county office manager subject to standards and qualifications furnished by the State Committee;
- (3) Fix the rate of compensation for all personnel in accordance with rate schedules approved by the State Committee;
- (4) Direct the activities of the community committees elected in the county;
- (5) Pursuant to official instructions, review, approve, and certify forms, reports, and documents requiring such action under such instructions;

- (6) Recommend to the State Committee needed changes in boundaries of communities;
- (7) Make available to the public information concerning the objectives and operations of the programs directed by the county committee;
- (8) Make available to agencies of the Federal Government and others information with respect to the county committee activities in accordance with instructions issued by the Administrator;
- (9) Give public notice of the designation and boundaries of each community within the county not less than 10 days prior to the election of community committeemen and delegates;
- (10) Give public notice at least five calendar days in advance of all meetings of program participants, all elections of community committeemen and delegates, and all conventions of delegates to elect county committeemen;
- (11) Recommend to the State Committee desirable changes in or additions to existing programs;
- (12) Conduct such hearings and investigations as the State Committee may request; and
- (13) Perform such other duties as may be prescribed by the State Committee.

17. What are the functions of ASC community committeemen, particularly as related to ACP?

Each county in the State is divided into communities composed of one, two, or more townships. The community committee is composed of three members elected by farmers participating in USDA programs in the community. The community committee assists the county committee in selecting practices needed and which should be included in the ACP for the county. The community committeemen are responsible for assisting farmers who desire to participate in the ACP by giving them information on the practices available, how to enroll and how to perform the practices, as well as reporting performance. The Community Committee shall:

- (1) Assist the county committee in carrying out programs assigned to it;
- (2) Inform farmers concerning the purposes and provisions of programs being administered in the county by the county committee;
- (3) Assist in arranging for and conducting the necessary community meetings of program participants; and
- (4) Perform such other duties as may be assigned to it by the county office manager under the direction of the county committee.

18. How are ASC county and community committeemen chosen?

Community committeemen are elected annually through the following procedure: The county election board is composed of the Extension Agent, as chairman, and heads of the Soil Conservation Service and

Farmers Home Administration in the county and the county head of the American Farm Bureau Federation, National Grange, and the National Farmers Union, if operating in the county. The primary duty of the county election board is to appoint a community election board for each community in the county. Each community election board is composed of three farmers other than incumbent community or county committeemen. The community election board conducts the election of community committeemen either through ballots sent to all farmers through the mail or by called election meetings presided over by the chairman of the community election board. Community election board members serve without pay.

The chairman of each elected community committee represents the community at a convention for the election of a county committee. The delegates to the county convention (community committee chairmen), at a set time and place, convene and elect by secret ballot a county committee composed of three members and two alternates. In the election procedure the delegates indicate which member is chairman, vice chairman, and regular member.

19. How is an annual ACP developed -- National, State, County?

The National Agricultural Conservation Program is generally developed as follows:

Annually, each ASC State Committee is asked to get suggestions through the ASC County Committees from all interested groups and organizations in each county. They are also asked to consult with Federal and State Government agencies having conservation responsibilities, State-wide farm organizations, and other interested groups and get their assistance in analyzing the suggestions submitted by ASC county committees.

Each ASC State Committee then forwards suggestions for a National program to the ACP Service in Washington. The Administrators of ACPs and the SCS, and the Chief of the U. S. Forest Service review the recommendations and agree on those practices that should be recommended to the Secretary of Agriculture for inclusion in the National Agricultural Conservation Program. The Agricultural Conservation Program National Bulletin issued by the Secretary of Agriculture includes a list of conservation practices approved for use wherever needed, together with the maximum rates of assistance and other essential details of the National Program.

The State Handbook of practices is developed as follows: Upon receipt of the National Bulletin, heads of State farm organizations and heads of all agricultural agencies, Federal and State, are invited to a meeting to select practices to be included in the State Handbook. The final practices selected for inclusion in the State Handbook must be agreed upon by the ASC State Committee, the State Conservationist of the SCS, and the State representative of the U. S. Forest Service. The State Handbook includes the practices considered needed in all parts of the State, the maximum rates of Federal cost-sharing for these practices, and detailed specifications of how the practices should be performed.

The ACProgram is developed at the county level as follows: Upon receipt of the State Handbook of practices, the ASC county committee, meeting with the heads of the State and Federal agencies and farm organizations operating in the county, selects practices to be included in the county handbook. At the conclusion of such a meeting, the ASC county committee, the technician representing the SCS in the county, and the representative of the U. S. Forest Service operating in the county agree upon the practices to be contained in the county handbook. The county handbook is then prepared and made available to farmers.

